

NHS Briefing Note: Salt & Ice Challenge – Risks to Children and Young People

**For: Directors of Children's Services and Directors of Public Health
– North East London**

September 2025

Background

- The "Salt and Ice Challenge" is an online trend where young people place salt on their skin and press ice on top for as long as possible.
- This creates a chemical reaction, rapidly lowering the temperature and causing cryogenic (cold) burns, similar to frostbite.
- Children and young people may underestimate the harm as the cold numbs the skin, masking pain until significant damage has occurred.

Risks

- Mixed depth injuries including full thickness (subdermal) burn wounds needing skin grafts, permanent scarring, possible nerve damage, and long-term impact on wellbeing.
- Peer and online pressure amplify the likelihood of wider uptake.

Recent Cases

- ED teams in North East London have already treated children for burns linked to this challenge.
- Similar surges have been reported nationally and internationally in the past.

Immediate First Aid Advice

- Warm the area by immersion in warm water for 30 – 60 minutes
- Do not rub or massage the area to avoid further tissue damage
- Do not apply ice, creams, or fluffy dressings.
- Cover with clean cling film or smooth plastic.
- Seek medical attention for deep, blistered, or extensive burns.

Recommended Actions for Schools, Parents and Carers

- Awareness: Alert staff, parents, and carers to the risks of the Salt & Ice Challenge.
- Education: Reinforce with children and young people that this is not a "harmless game" but can cause serious and lasting harm.
- Safeguarding: Be alert to children presenting with unexplained burn injuries and consider safeguarding risks.

Communication suggestions:

- Use assemblies, PSHE lessons, and parent newsletters to share simple prevention messages.

Key Messages for Young People

- “The Salt & Ice Challenge can leave permanent scars—don’t risk it.”
- “Cold burns damage tissue, even if you can’t feel it happening.”
- “Don’t hurt yourself for likes—there are safer ways to have fun online.”

Suggested Next Steps

- Please cascade this briefing across your schools and networks.
- Local safeguarding and health teams can provide further advice if required.




For further information contact:

- Insert local safeguarding contacts

Suggested messaging:

Parent & Carer Alert: The “Salt & Ice Challenge”

A dangerous online trend is resurfacing where children put salt on their skin and press ice on top.

-  This causes serious cold burns (like frostbite).
-  Injuries can need hospital treatment and even skin grafts.
-  Young people may not realise the damage until it’s too late.

✅ First Aid: warm area with immersion in warm water for 30 – 60 minute, cover with clean cling film, and seek medical help.

❌ Do NOT Rub or massage the area to avoid further tissue damage, Do Not use ice, creams, or fluffy dressings.

Message for children & young people:

- 💡 Hurting yourself for likes isn’t worth it. The scars can last a lifetime.

Suggested Social Media posts:

⚠️ The “Salt & Ice Challenge” is NOT harmless. It causes severe cold burns, scarring & sometimes skin grafts. Please talk to children & young people—don’t risk lasting damage for online likes.

Parents & carers: beware the “Salt & Ice Challenge.” ❄️ + 🧴 = burns.

- ✅ warm area with warm water by immersion for 30 – 60 minute
- ✅ Cover with cling film
- ✅ Seek medical help

Do not rub or massage the area or it can cause further tissue damage
Don't let a trend leave permanent scars.

Young people: the "Salt & Ice Challenge" can leave scars for life. ❄️ It's not worth it for likes. Protect your skin, protect your future. ❤️ #StaySafe

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